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Message Text

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47
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
---------- 050332
P 271609Z JAN 76
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6034

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 0475

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, SY
SUBJECT: PROPOSED ANSWER TO SENATOR BROCK'S LETTER TO AMBASSADOR
RE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

1. AMBASSADOR HAS RECEIVED FOLLOWING LETTER FROM
SENATOR BROCK INQUIRING ABOUT STATUS OF USG EFFORTS
ON BEHALF OF SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY: BEGIN QUOTE.

OVER THE LAST SIX MONTHS, INFORMATION ON THE
STATUS OF UNITED STATES' EFFORTS TO EFFECT THE
REUNIFICATION OF SYRIAN JEWISH FAMILIES AS WELL AS
TO OPEN THE DOOR FOR FREE EMIGRATION OF SYRIAN JEWS,
HAS DIMINISHED TO A TRICKLE. I AM CERTAIN FROM MY
TALKS WITH CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ OF YOUR RECOGNITION OF
THE PRIORITY THAT THIS SHOULD HAVE IN OUR RELATIONS WITH
THE GOVERNMENT OF SYRIA.

IT IS FOR THAT REASON THAT I WRITE REQUESTING YOUR
EARLIEST RESPONSE ON THE CURRENT STATUS OF OUR
EFFORTS AND YOUR EVALUATION OF A TIME FRAME WITHIN
WHICH YOUR OWN EFFORTS WILL GO FORWARD.

IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS THE CONGRESS WILL
MAKE CRITICAL DECISIONS OVER THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE
UNITED STATES IN MANY COUNTRIES. AS THE AMOUNTS OF
AID INVOLVED IN FOR INSTANCE ANGOLA WERE MADE SUBJECT
OF CONSIDERABLE SCRUTINY, I DARE SAY THAT PAYMENTS
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EITHER IN KIND OR BY WAY OF DIRECT GRANTS-IN-AID WILL

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REQUIRE SUPPORTIVE DATA TO SUSTAIN THE CONTINUING
RELATIONSHIP.

I WOULD HOPE THAT YOU WILL BE ABLE TO RESPOND TO
THIS REQUEST AT YOUR EARLIEST CONVENIENCE.

I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR RESPONSE AND EXTEND BEST
WISHES FOR A CONTINUATION AND SUCCESS IN YOUR POST.
END QUOTE.

2. AMBASSADOR PROPOSES REPLY AS FOLLOWS: BEGIN QUOTE.

I WELCOME THIS CHANCE TO SHARE WITH YOU MY
ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY
AND WHAT CAN BE DONE ON THE ISSUES OF REUNIFICATION WITH RELATIVES
IN THE UNITED STATES AND FREE EMIGRATION.

MY ANALYSIS IS THAT THE DOORS FOR REUNIFICATION
AND FREE EMIGRATION OF THE SYRIAN JEWS WILL FULLY OPEN
ONLY IN A SITUATION OF OVERALL MIDDLE EASTERN PEACE.
I DO NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF INTERIM PROGRESS,
PARTICULARLY FOR INDIVIDUAL CASES OF REUNIFICATION
AS THE PEACE PROCESS MOVES FORWARD, BUT I WOULD NOT
MISLEAD YOU BY PRETENDING TO BE ABLE TO PREDICT A TIME FRAME.

THE SYRIAN REFUSAL TO PERMIT EMIGRATION OF ITS
JEWISH COMMUNITY DERIVES FROM THE FACT THAT SYRIA
IS STILL IN A STATE OF WAR WITH ISRAEL. IT IS THIS
WHICH DISTINGUISHES THE SITUATION OF THE SYRIAN JEW
FROM THAT OF THE SOVIET JEW. SYRIA CONSIDERS IT
CANNOT SANCTION THE DEPARTURE OF A SYRIAN CITIZEN WHO
MIGHT EVENTUALLY SETTLE IN ISRAEL AND CONTRIBUTE IN
SOME WAY, HOWEVER SMALL, TO ISRAEL'S STRENGTH. FOR
THIS REASON THE PRESENT SYRIAN LEADERSHIP IS NOT
PREPARED TO MAKE ANY EXCEPTIONS TO THE LONGSTANDING
POLICY HERE OF ALLOWING NO EMIGRATION FOR MEMBERS OF
THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY.

I DISCUSSED THIS WITH CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ
SEVERAL TIMES LAST YEAR. HIS REACTION THEN WAS THAT
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THIS PROJECTION WAS TOO INDEFINITE INSOFAR AS THE
SITUATION OF THE SYRIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY IS CONCERNED.
IN HIS VIEW, AS OF LAST YEAR AT LEAST, THE RIGID
POLITICAL POSITIONS ADOPTED BY SYRIA VIS-A-VIS THE
PEACE PROCESS, TOGETHER WITH THE BITTERNESS WHICH HAS
DOMINATED SYRIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS, PROMISED NO PROSPECTS
FOR AN EARLY SIGNIFICANT MOVEMENT TOWARDS PEACE
MUCH LESS A PEACE SETTLEMENT.

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I DO NOT SHARE THIS ESTIMATE ON THE BASIC
PROSPECT OF MOVEMENT TOWARDS PEACE. YOU WELL KNOW
THE DEDICATION OF SUCCESSIVE AMERICAN ADMINISTRATIONS
TO THE CAUSE OF SECURING A MIDEAST PEACE. PERHAPS
YOU SHARE MY EVALUATION THAT DEVELOPMENTS OVER THE
PAST TWO YEARS HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY POSITIVE AND
PROMISE FURTHER PROGRESS IN THE FUTURE. I BELIEVE THE
SYRIANS ARE SERIOUSLY SEARCHING FOR A PEACEFUL SOLUTION
TO THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. HOWEVER MUCH SOME OF
THEIR PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED POSITIONS ABOUT THE PEACE
PROCESS MAY MAKE THEM AT TIMES APPEAR DISINTERESTED
IN PEACE, THIS IS NOT THE REALITY.

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
---------- 050443
P 271609Z JAN 76
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6035

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 0475

EXDIS

AS CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ WAS TOLD PERSONALLY BY
PRESIDENT ASAD LAST YEAR, THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP IS
SYMPATHETIC ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS TO THE CONCERNS OF
FAMILIES LONG SEPARATED. HE GAVE HIS PERSONAL ASSURANCE
THAT FORMER SYRIAN JEWS WHO ARE NOW AMERICAN CITIZENS
WOULD BE WELCOME BACK HERE ON FAMILY VISITS. DESPITE
THE PUBLICITY WHICH I BELIEVE CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ GAVE
THIS ASSURANCE, NO AMERICAN CITIZENS OF SYRIAN-JEWISH
ORIGINS HAVE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF IT. I AM TOLD THAT THEY
FEEL TOO UNCERTAIN ABOUT HOW THEY WOULD BE TREATED
IN SYRIA TO RISK A VISIT. THIS I SINCERELY BELIEVE TO
BE A MISREADING; I HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE PRESIDENT'S
ASSURANCE THAT AMERICAN VISITORS COMING HERE WOULD ENCOUNTER
NO PROBLEMS WITH THE AUTHORITIES.

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I AND THE STAFF OF MY EMBASSY HAVE DEDICATED
CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO ANSWERING QUESTIONS
RECEIVED FROM AMERICA FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE
WELFARE OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS OF THE SYRIAN JEWISH
COMMUNITY. BY ALL OBJECTIVE MEASURES, CONDITIONS FOR
THEIR COMMUNITY HAVE IMPROVED OVER THOSE OF THE PAST DECADE.
THERE IS EVIDENCE THEY ARE CONTINUING TO IMPROVE. IN THE LAST
FEW DAYS I HAVE HEARD FROM MIKE WALLACE AND HIS CBS TEAM WHICH
HAS JUST LEFT DAMASCUS ABOUT THE RESULTS OF THEIR OWN INVESTI-
GATION OF THE COMMUNITY. WALLACE FIRST TREATED THIS SUBJECT
ON HIS "SIXTY MINUTES" PROGRAM A YEAR AGO AND HE TELLS
ME THAT HIS FINDINGS THIS TIME SUPPORT HIS EARLIER CONCLUSION
THAT THE CONDITIONS OF DAILY LIFE HAD IMPROVED FOR THE COMMUNITY.
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(I BELIEVE WALLACE PLANS TO SCREEN HIS NEW REPORT ON"SIXTY
MINUTES" IN LATE FEBRUARY.)

WE DO NOT RELY, OF COURSE, JUST ON THE EVALUATIONS OF VISITING
JOURNALISTS. WE HAVE OURSELVES CONTACTS WITH INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY
MEMBERS. WE HAVE ISSUED SOME VISAS TO SYRIAN JEWS TO TRAVEL TO THE
UNITED STATES ON BUSINESS AND FAMILY VISITS DURING THE
PAST YEAR. WE HAVE BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN ONE RECENT
CASE IN FACILITATING VISA ISSUANCE BY ANOTHER EMBASSY
FOR ONE OF THE ALEPPO JEWISH COMMUNITY SEEKING A TOURIST VISA
FOR LATIN AMERICA.
I HAVE RELIABLE INFORMATION THAT PASSPORTS ARE BEING
GRANTED TO SYRIAN JEWS FOR BUSINESS VISITS ABROAD,
FOR MEDICAL CARE, AS WELL AS FOR TOURISM. THEY ARE REQUIRED TO
POST BOND IN EACH CASE AS EARNEST OF THEIR INTENT TO RETURN.

IT WOULD BE PRESUMPTUOUS OF ME TO ASSERT THAT
OUR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST AND THOSE BY AMERICAN
VISITORS TO DAMASCUS, BOTH OFFICIAL AND PRIVATE, IN
THE WELFARE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY HAS BY ITSELF
BROUGHT ABOUT THESE CHANGES. AT THE SAME TIME I AM
CONVINCED THAT OUR KNOWN CONTINUING INTEREST AND QUIET EXPRESSIONS
OF CONCERN HAVE HELPED THE COMMUNITY'S STATUS WITHIN
SYRIA.

FINALLY, I UNDERSTAND YOUR POINT ABOUT THE
INTEREST OF CONGRESS IN SCRUTINIZING THE PROPOSED AID
PROGRAM FOR SYRIA CAREFULLY. BEYOND SYRIA'S INTEREST
IN PEACE AND IN COOPERATING TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE
WITH THE UNITED STATES IN OBTAINING IT, I SHOULD MENTION
DAMASCUS HAS WELCOMED OUR INTEREST IN SUPPORTING ITS
MOVES TOWARDS MORE RAPID ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. IT
RESPECTS OUR TECHNOLOGICAL AND MANAGERIAL KNOW-HOW.
IT IS KEENLY AWARE OF HOW MUCH THE SERIES OF MIDDLE
EAST WARS OVER THE PAST GENERATION HAS SLOWED DOWN ITS

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DEVELOPMENT. WE WOULD BE MISTAKEN TO THINK, HOWEVER, THAT SYRIA MIGHT BE DETERRED FROM POLICIES WHICH IT CONSIDERS IN ITS NATIONAL SECURITY INTEREST BY A CONGRESSIONAL DECISION AGAINST PROVIDING IT WITH ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE. NOR WILL SYRIANS, AS I HAVE COME TO KNOW THEM OVER MANY YEARS, RESPOND POSITIVELY
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TO PUBLIC CHALLENGES FROM ABROAD ON QUESTIONS THEY CONSIDER IMPUGN THEIR SOVEREIGNTY. END QUOTE.

3. ACTION REQUESTED. ADVISE WHETHER PROPOSED REPLY IS ACCEPTABLE OR WHAT CHANGES DEPARTMENT WISHES US MAKE BEFORE REPLYING DIRECTLY. GIVEN LENGTHY TIME FOR POUCH TRANSMISSION, WE PROPOSE CABLE APPROVED TEXT TO BE RELAYED BY H TO SENATOR BROCK. (SENATOR'S LETTER OF JANUARY 5 WAS RECEIVED HERE JANUARY 23.)
MURPHY

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04 MAY 2006

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